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Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79T00865A001400230001-2

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Saudis Move to Join International Labor
Organization

Saudi Arabia, the only Arab League country--except for certain small Persian Gulf states--not associated with the International Labor Organization (ILO), has requested full membership in the UN specialized body.

According to the US embassy in Jidda, the Saudis submitted their application last week and will presumably be given observer status until pro forma approval is granted by the organization at its annual conference next year.

Former King Faysal was strongly opposed to the ILO, considering it a disruptive and radical force on the international scene, and Jidda's move is significant in terms of the new regime's changed policies. The decisive factor in the decision to apply was the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs who apparently believes that Arabia can benefit significantly from ILO's training programs and the expertise made available through membership. An application for vocational education assistance will probably be submitted shortly.

The Saudi application comes at a time when the ILO faces a number of difficult problems. It is experiencing severe financial strains, and may face "bankruptcy," if Washington--which pays about a quarter of the budget--decides to withdraw its support. At the annual conference last month, observer status was granted to the Palestine Liberation Organization despite strong US opposition and a temporary walkout by other delegations including the Israelis, the Dutch and the West Germans.

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Saudi Arabia might well be asked to fill the financial gap resulting from a decision by the US to withdraw.

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Austrian Opposition Party Narrows
Leadership Selection

It now appears that the conservative Austrian People's Party will draft Josef Taus, the 41-year-old director of the savings bank system and member of the party's labor league, as its chancellor-candidate for the national elections on October 5. Taus is expected to be approved as the party's new chairman as well, at an extraordinary party congress on July 31. He replaces Karl Schleinzner who was killed in an automobile accident last weekend.

Although Taus is less well known than the two other possible candidates most often mentioned--Alois Mock and Stephan Koren--he is the choice of many prominent party members. Nominations may be made from the floor of the congress, but the possibility of a struggle for the party leadership has receded as a result of a statement by Mock indicating that he is prepared to support Taus.

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NATO Allies Consult on Israeli UN Expulsion Issue

This week's consultations among NATO representatives, in preparation for the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September, reflected strong support for a tough Western stand against the anticipated Arab attempt to suspend Israel. Some European representatives made it clear, however, that they are reluctant to bring about a confrontation between the developed and developing countries over the issue.

This attempt by NATO members to agree on a position in advance of the UN meeting was part of an overall US initiative to broaden political consultation within NATO. What gave significance to the meeting, however, and overcame initial European foot-dragging on completing arrangements for it, was the desire to discuss Secretary Kissinger's speech last week in Milwaukee calling for a firm stand against recent trends in the UN.

There were two basic reactions to proposals to formulate a Western position should the Arabs attempt to suspend Israel. The UK proposed that the allies make a "robust" demarche to the Arabs about the illegality of such a move under UN charter rules. Concern was expressed by France, among others, that the West should avoid tactics that would provoke the Arab states. But within this group there was general support to oppose any Arab move on the grounds that such steps would be illegal. Reference in the Secretary's speech to a preference for collaboration over confrontation and US emphasis on avoiding a direct linkage between the Israeli question and economic issues, clearly facilitated an agreement.

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On the other hand, some of the representatives expressed strong reservations about the US position. The Norwegian representative argued that priority should be given to the need for the industrialized countries to accept the "new economic order" concept and take steps to achieve "a more just distribution of wealth" in the world. Implied in this emphasis is the suggestion that the Western stand on Israel ought to take second place to the need to establish good relations with the developing states. Such an attitude seems to indicate that the allies still lack a unified stand on this issue.

This preliminary meeting dealing with matters outside the usual concerns of the Alliance was widely hailed as a useful step in increasing consultation among the NATO allies. No decision has yet been taken on a proposal to hold further discussions in September.

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New Spanish Opposition Coalition Issues Program

The new center-left opposition coalition formed last month has followed up its denunciation of the Franco regime by drafting a platform outlining its political program.

Agreement on the program was reportedly difficult because of the diverse ideological views represented by the 16 parties and various labor organizations in the coalition, which calls itself the "Platform of Democratic Convergence." These groups range from radical dissident Communists opposed to the Spanish Communist Party to moderate Christian Democrats. In fact, two conservative Christian Democratic factions refused to sign, reportedly because of the inclusion of extremist groups. Despite their reservations, the factions intend to continue to send observers to meetings of the new organization.

The US embassy in Madrid believes that the diverse ideologies represented may make it difficult for the coalition to hold together. Nevertheless, the Democratic Convergence has the potential to become a major political force in the post-Franco period if the coalition is able to maintain cohesiveness. It will serve as a counterweight to the Communist-dominated Democratic Junta formed in Paris last year.

The program made public by the Democratic Convergence outlines in considerable detail its future goals. Rejecting the Franco regime and the imposed monarchical successor state on grounds that "dictatorship is not reformable and liberty

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is not negotiable," the program calls for a referendum to decide the form of the future Spanish government. In addition, the program strongly supports establishment of a federal state and the right of self-determination for Spain's diverse nationalities--a common feature of most opposition groups' goals but anathema to the armed forces.

The new coalition promises to respect Spain's international commitments but specifically excludes those limiting "national independence." This appears to be a veiled reference to the US-Spanish Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation under which the US maintains bases in Spain. This reference implies that any base agreements concluded by the present regime should be reviewed in the post-Franco period.

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